

The Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Fall 2021 Update

Health Workforce Council Meeting

October 28, 2021

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Purpose

Since 2016, the Health Workforce Sentinel Network has supported efficient and effective health workforce preparation and deployment by:

- **Identifying emerging signals** of changes in health workforce demand.
- Tracking and identifying **trends over time**.
- **Rapidly disseminating information** to education, training and policy partners who can respond to findings.

Guiding Principles

- Minimize response burden
- Focus on changes in workforce demand (i.e., not quantifying demand)
- Provide timely information
- Maximize relevance to health workforce planning
- Bring together healthcare partners to review and respond

View full
responses
and policy
briefings
on the
Sentinel
Network
Website

wa.sentinelnetwork.org

All Findings are Available on the Dashboards

<http://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings>

Occupations Experiencing Demand Changes by Facility Type

Facility Type(s): (All) | Data Collection Date(s): (All) | Number of Occupations to Display: 0 | Question: Vacancy

Sentinels responded 'Yes' to the question:

Has your facility experienced exceptionally long vacancies for any open positions?

Click on an occupation (Ctrl+Click on multiple occupations) to view reasons. Hover over the bar to see a description of the data. * Indicates an occupation newly added for July - Sept. 2018

Facility Type	Occupation	Response Count
Spring 2020 Acute care hospital (25 beds or fewer)	Athletic Trainer	1
	Chemical Dependency Pro.	1
	Exercise Physiologist*	1
	Physician/Surgeon	1
	Respiratory Therapist	1
	Respiratory Therapy Tech.	1
	Social Worker - Healthcar.	1
	Nurse Anesthetist	1
	Nurse, Registered	1
	Athletic Trainer	1
Acute care hospital (more than 25 beds)	Diagnostic Medical Sonog.	1
	Medical Assistant	1
	Mental Health Counselor	1
	Chemical Dependency Pro.	1
	Peer Counselor	1
Behavioral-mental health clinic/outpatient mental health and substance abuse clinic	Social Worker - Mental He.	1
	Case Manager	1
	Community Health Worker	1
	Medical Assistant	1
	Nurse Practitioner	1
	Nurse, Licensed Practical	1
	Psychologist, Clinical And	1
	Dental Hygienist	1
	Dental Assistant	1
	Administrative Personnel	1
Dentist office/dental clinic	Dentist	1
	Health Information Techn.	1
	Medical Records Specialis.	1
	Dental Assistant	1
	Physician/Surgeon	1
Federally qualified health center (FQHC) or community clinic providing care free or on sliding fee scale	Dental Hygienist	1
	Dentist	1
	Nurse, Registered	1
	Social Worker - Mental He.	1
	Chemical Dependency Pro.	1
	Community Health Worker	1
	Dietitian/Nutritionist	1

Occupations Experiencing Demand Changes by Reported Level of Rural and Urban Residents Served

Facility Type(s): (All) | Data Collection Date(s): Spring 2020 | Number of Occupations to Display: 0 | Select Demand Change Category to Display: Training

Sentinels responded 'Yes' to the question:

Have there been changes in your organization/facility's priorities regarding your existing (incumbent) workforce?

our facility provide services to mostly urban residents, mostly rural residents? Note: This question was not asked before July 2018

Click on an occupation (Ctrl+Click on multiple occupations) to view reasons. Move your cursor over the bars to read comments for the selected occupation(s)

Occupation	Response Count	Comments
Chemical Dependency Pro.	1	[Chemical Dependency Professional/Substance Abuse And Behavioral Disorder Counselor] Training in a telehealth or videohealth-based services and technology, training the appropriate use of personal protective equipment, training on how to keep safe and healthy during the pandemic
Medical Assistant	1	
Mental Health Counselor	1	
Peer Counselor	1	
Mental Health Counselor	1	
Nurse, Licensed Practical	1	
Social Worker - Mental He.	1	
Dental Hygienist	1	
Dental Assistant	1	
Administrative Personnel	1	
Dentist	1	
Dental Hygiene Students	1	
Receptionist	1	
Dental Hygienist	1	
Dental Assistant	1	
Dentist	1	
Insurance Benefit Coordin.	1	
Patient Care Coordinator	1	
Sterilization Technician	1	
Dental Hygienist	1	
Dentist	1	
Dental Assistant	1	
Administrative Personnel	1	
Office Manager	1	
Medical Assistant	1	
Physician/Surgeon	1	
Chemical Dependency Pro.	1	
Community Health Worker	1	
Dental Assistant	1	
Dental Hygienist	1	
Dentist	1	
Dietitian/Nutritionist	1	

Occupations Experiencing Demand Changes by Geographic Region

Data Collection Date(s): Spring 2020 | Demand Change Category: Turnover | Number of Occupations to Display: 0

Sentinels responded 'Yes' to the question:

Has worker retention/turnover been a problem at your organization/facility?

Click on an occupation (Ctrl+Click on multiple occupations) to view reasons. Hover over the bar to see a description of the data. * Indicates an occupation newly added for July - Sept. 2018

Move your cursor over the bars to read comments for the selected occupation(s)

Region	Occupation	Response Count	Comments
Spring 2020 Better Health Together (hover on map to see region)	Dental Assistant	1	
	Dental Hygienist	1	
	Administrative Personnel	1	
	Dental Hygiene Students	1	
	Dentist	1	
	Nurse Anesthetist	1	
	Community Health Worker	1	
	Medical Records Specialis.	1	
	Physician/Surgeon	1	
	Dental Hygienist	1	
Spring 2020 Cascade Pacific Action Alliance (hover on map to see region)	Nurse, Licensed Practical	1	
	Nurse, Registered	1	
	Dental Assistant	1	
	Dentist	1	
	Administrative Personnel	1	
Spring 2020 Elevate Health Greater Columbia HealthierHere	Response to COVID-19	1	[Dental Hygienist] Due to fears about COVID, one of my dental hygienists may not return to work and need to be replaced.
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Other reasons	1	
	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
	Workload/patient acuity l.	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
Response to COVID-19	1		
Spring 2020 North Central	Workload/patient acuity l.	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
Spring 2020 North Sound	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
	Workload/patient acuity l.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
Spring 2020 Olympic	Workload/patient acuity l.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
Spring 2020 Southwest ACH	Response to COVID-19	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	
	Recruitment and retentio.	1	
	Response to COVID-19	1	
	Salary/wage/benefits iss.	1	

Policy briefs from prior rounds are available on the website

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network website. It includes a search icon, the organization's name and logo, contact information, and a main navigation menu. Below the navigation bar, the text "SPRING 2021" is centered. Underneath, there is a grid of nine dark blue buttons with white text, each representing a different facility type: Small Hospitals, Large Hospitals, Nursing Homes/Skilled Nursing Facilities, Assisted Living Facilities, Behavioral Health Clinics, FQHCs and Community Clinics, Primary Care Clinics, Dental Offices/Clinics, and Pharmacies.

Washington's Health Workforce
SENTINEL NETWORK

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HOME ABOUT JOIN FINDINGS ▾ TEAM

SPRING 2021

SMALL HOSPITALS LARGE HOSPITALS NURSING HOMES/SKILLED NURSING FACILITIES

ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINICS FQHCs AND COMMUNITY CLINICS

PRIMARY CARE CLINICS DENTAL OFFICES/CLINICS PHARMACIES

View at <https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/overview>

Example of a policy brief



Spring 2021

Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network

Findings Brief:
Behavioral/Mental Health, Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Clinics and Residential Treatment Facilities

Behavioral/mental health, SUD and residential treatment facilities provided information about their workforce needs to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network, most recently in April/May 2021. This Findings Brief provides their response themes as well as examples of specific comments, with an emphasis on the most recent findings. Responses since 2016 may be viewed at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/.

Behavioral health facilities' responses to pandemic-related questions are highlighted below. More pandemic-specific findings from earlier in the pandemic are at www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/.

Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic reported by Behavioral Health facilities: Themes and examples

In the past 6 months, have there been overall staffing changes at your facility due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
 THEMES: Responses split evenly between those with extra staffing challenges due to COVID and those without.

- We lost several clinicians for childcare and health reasons at the start of COVID. We've had lots of absences due to quarantine/isolation. The state's Paid Family Medical Leave Act has caused us a HUGE problem. There is no incentive to return to work as they can take PMLA and then go on unemployment.
- Need for more resources in mental health due to COVID-19 impact.
- COVID is probably not the biggest factor leading to workforce challenges. Instead, I believe our issue is that of having a limited recruitment pool in our rural area.

What about the staffing arrangements at your facility made it easier/harder to respond to the pandemic?

- Telehealth initially made it easier, but our staff is much happier now that we are back in-person, present in the clinics.
- This switch [to telehealth] did make us more accessible to clients in a way we hadn't been before.
- What made it harder was safety. We had to eliminate or limit staff traveling from one facility to another, helping out at other facilities and that type of limitation to ensure patient and staff safety.
- We did close our day center for a number of months. We found it impossible to keep clients 6 ft. apart.

Describe the workforce impact, if any, of the use of telehealth at your facility over the past 6 months.
 THEMES: Telehealth was useful for some patient populations, but many are eager to get back to in-person treatment.

- In the beginning this was great for many clients and still is, but now during the last six months many clients are tired of telehealth and want face to face appointments.
- It has brought therapy to patients that normally would not be able to receive therapy.
- With our population (serious and complex issues) it's just not sufficient at all for practical reasons (most clients do not have a computer or internet access - only phone if that) and many have hesitations about technology.

Did your organization do anything to encourage your staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? If so, what strategies were or were not successful?
 THEMES: Education and incentives were common. Vaccination rates for staff varied.

- We provided fairly intense education about the risks and benefits. About 90% of our staff chose to get the vaccine.
- We have left the decision up each staff-we will not force the staff to get vaccinated if they do not wish to.
- We offered a one day floating holiday to be used at time of choice and \$100. We also had presentations from the health district to address fears. Yet we are only 55% vaccinated at this current time.
- It seemed that those who planned to be vaccinated jumped in right away, and those who were initially reluctant, remain reluctant. We may come up with some kind of reinforcement for those vaccinated, but have not yet decided.

What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by policy, regulatory, and/or payment changes?
 THEMES: Low wages could be addressed by higher Medicaid reimbursement rates.

- Medicaid reimbursement rates to support staff needed to adequately provides treatment services.
- Licensure reciprocity in WA State.
- Shortage of masters-level clinicians. Loan reimbursement, ability to pay higher wages and reduction in supervision requirements are all possible solutions.

www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org
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Behavioral Health Facilities (Spring 2021)

Between 2016 and 2021, over the course of 10 reporting periods, behavioral health* and other health care facilities in Washington provided key, on-the-ground information to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. Below are highlights of trends over time and recent findings. More findings from behavioral/mental health, SUD and residential treatment facilities, along with those from other health care facilities, are at wa.sentinelnetwork.org.

Behavioral Health Facilities* - Occupations with exceptionally long vacancies: 2016-2021

Top occupations cited as having exceptionally long vacancies by date of reporting								
Rank	Spring 2017	Fall 2017	Summer 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020	Spring 2021
1	Mental health counselor	Chemical dependency professional	Mental health counselor	Mental health counselor	Mental health counselor	Mental health counselor	Mental health counselor	Mental health counselor
2	Chemical dependency professional	Mental health counselor	Chemical dependency professional Peer counselor	Chemical dependency professional	Chemical dependency professional	Chemical dependency professional	Chemical dependency professional (SUDP)***	Substance use disorder professional***
3	Social worker	Social worker Nurse practitioner	Nurse practitioner	Social worker	Peer counselor	Social worker	Social worker (Mental Health/SUDP)	Psychiatrist Social worker
4	Nurse practitioner	Peer counselor	Social worker Psychiatrist	Marriage & family therapist	Marriage & family therapist	Peer counselor	Registered nurse	Peer counselor
5	Registered nurse	Registered nurse	Marriage & family therapist	Peer counselor Psychiatrist	Social worker	Multiple occupations cited at same frequency	Marriage & family therapist Peer counselor Psychiatrist	Registered nurse

↑ Most cited

*Behavioral/mental health, substance use disorder clinics and residential treatment facilities
 **Summer and Winter 2016 findings not shown due to space constraints
 ***Occupation title changed to Substance Use Disorder Professional (SUDP) in 2019

Reasons for vacancies reported by Behavioral Health facilities

Most vacancy issues were related to salary demands or applicant qualifications.

- [Multiple occupations] Integrated care has created competition for these positions with agencies that can afford to pay at higher rates because of the difference in reimbursement for services.
- [Multiple occupations] Frequently, as soon as clinicians/therapists meet licensure requirements, they leave for a position in a hospital, clinic or private practice where wages are higher and documentation requirements are lower.
- Ongoing turn-over with our Psychiatric aides (we use Certified Nursing Assistants whenever we can) and very limited application pool. McDonalds has a starting salary higher (\$15/hr.) than we can pay.
- Many SUDP/Ts salary/wage expectations are above what the agency can pay due to low Medicaid rates.
- [Chemical dependency professionals/Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors] Finding that applicants are not proficient in writing treatment plans.
- Finding an SUDP with a Masters degree is like finding a unicorn. Please make this an easier process.

Spring 2021
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Key themes from April/May 2021

- Many workforce challenges pre-dated COVID-19, but the pandemic exacerbated the difficulties
- Wage competition and burnout were reported in many settings, and made it difficult to cover staffing needs
- Patient volumes were returning to normal in some settings, but serving a backlog of appointments was a challenge in others
- Employers were still responding to needs related to COVID-19, but felt that the situation was more stable (new normal)

Current efforts - Fall 2021

October 1 – Employers began sharing their experiences

November 7 – Last chance to participate until Spring 2022

Early December – Findings available at wa.sentinelnetwork.org



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Sentinel Network workforce demand questions

Recently (in the past 6 months):

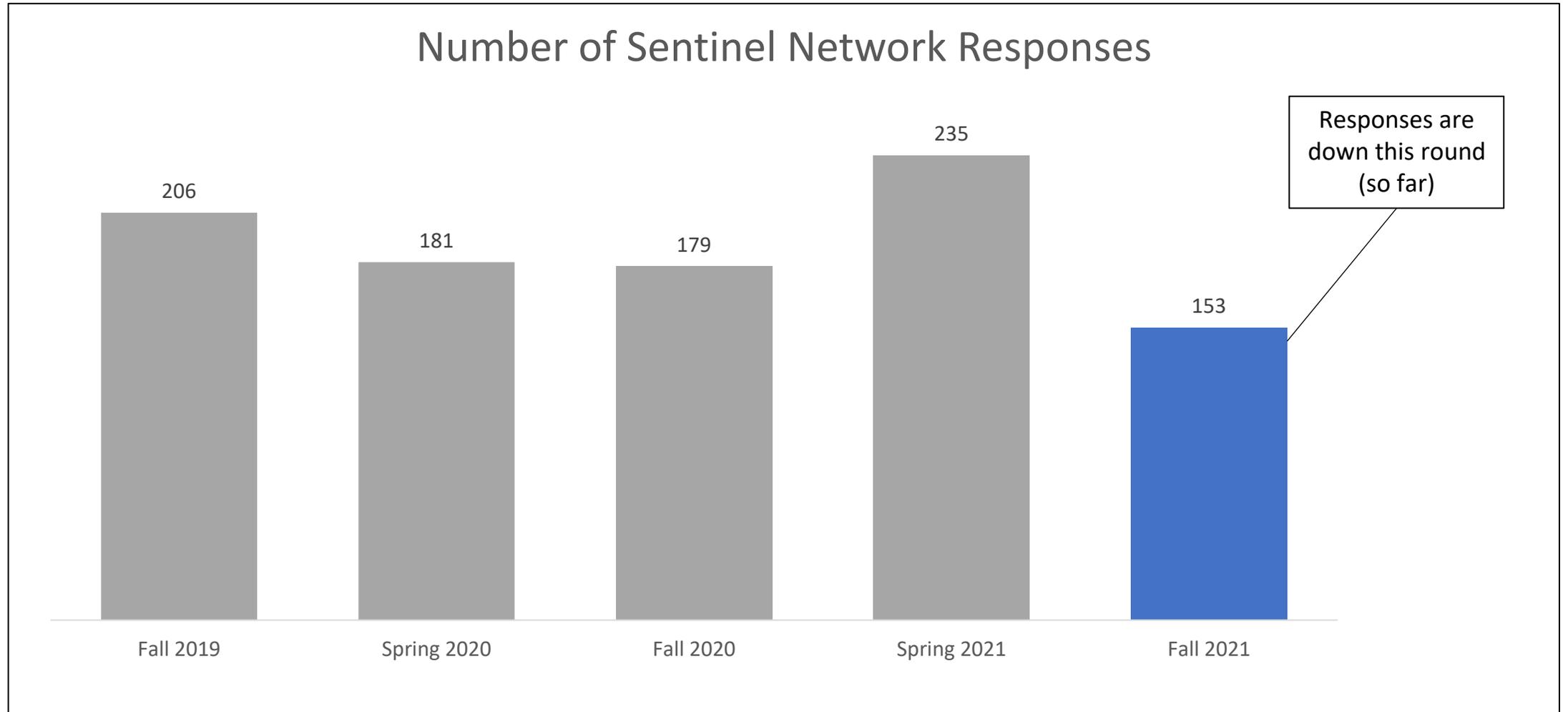
- Occupations experiencing exceptionally long **vacancies**
- Occupations with exceptional **turnover**
- Occupations with increased or decreased **demand**
- **New occupations** that they did not previously employ
- **New roles** for existing employees
- Changes in **orientation/onboarding procedures** for new employees
- Changes in **training priorities** for existing employees
- Does your facility serve **urban, rural or a mix** of urban and rural clients?
- How has your facility responded to the **COVID-19** crisis?

With a focus on qualitative input about which, how, and reasons why

Sentinel Network COVID questions - Fall 2021

1. How have your facility's staffing arrangements/configurations affected your ability to respond to patient demand during the past 6 months?
2. What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by new or modified policies, regulations, and/or payment rules?
3. How has the pandemic affected your ability to support educational/training opportunities (e.g. by providing externships/clinical training opportunities for students, or post-graduate fellowships/residencies/supervised practice)? Have you found strategies to help support these activities during the pandemic?
4. To what extent has your organization used recruitment incentives like sign-on bonuses during the pandemic? What recruitment strategies have been most successful?
5. Have you implemented new retention strategies during the pandemic? Please describe.
6. Compared with 2 years ago (before the pandemic), how would you describe the number of vacancies you're now trying to fill? (If possible, please provide rough estimates, such as "about half as many" or "about the same number" or "twice as many"). If you've recently had changes in staff vacancies at your facility, were they due mostly to increases or decreases in service demand, changes in staff turnover, or a combination of these factors?

Recent responses



Implications of current response counts

Policy Briefing Documents

Published in Previous Rounds	Planned for Fall 2021
Assisted Living Facilities	Assisted Living Facilities
Behavioral Health Clinics	Behavioral Health Clinics
Dental Offices/Clinics	Dental Offices/Clinics
Nursing Homes/SNFs	Nursing Homes/SNFs
Small Hospitals	X Small Hospitals
Large Hospitals	X Large Hospitals
FQHCs and Community Clinics	X FQHCs and Community Clinics
Pharmacies	X Pharmacies
Primary Care Clinics	X Primary Care Clinics

Recruitment strategies



“Trusted leaders” distribute announcements

- Email
- Twitter
- Newsletters
- Regular meetings

Direct emails to past participants

There is still time! Help spread the word before **November 7th**



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